

Commitments must be included in Categorical Exclusion (CE), Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI), and Record Of Decision (ROD) documents as well as the draft and final EIS.

Public Involvement is an important input to help identify acceptable solutions to address adverse impacts.

Examples

Avoidance

Change an alignment so that there are no displacements.

Redesign a road segment as an underpass to avoid cutting off access to a community facility.

Minimization

Reroute or shift a highway segment to reduce displacements.

Limit interchanges to minimize incompatible land-use development.

Phase the project to minimize impedance to business access during peak shopping periods.

Alter an alignment to increase the distance between the facility and residences to minimize noise impacts.

Mitigation

Set aside land for a park or add to public recreation areas to replace lost facilities.

Erect sound barriers to mitigate noise to surrounding communities.

Provide a bicycle/pedestrian overpass or underpass to provide access to public facilities.

Provide compensation for properties acquired (a mandatory measure under the Uniform Act Amendments).

Enhancement

Provide signage to recognize specific cultural or historical resources.

Develop bicycle trails or paths adjacent to roadways.

Plant trees and add park benches.

Add public artwork or a facade to a transportation facility to match the aesthetic design goals of a community.



What are some examples of specific techniques to address impacts?

Two Types of Enhancements

The analyst should recognize the distinction between:

- **Environmental Enhancements**, which may be added to a transportation project to improve community acceptance (see 1990 FHWA Environmental Policy Statement).
- **Transportation Enhancements**, which are funded through a provision of ISTEA with funds set aside from the Surface Transportation Program.

Environmental Enhancements are incorporated into a project as part of routine decisionmaking to make it more

compatible with and sensitive to community needs. Transportation Enhancements funding may be available to help meet these needs.

Potential Methods to Deal with a Barrier Effect

Examine what can be done to avoid creating the barrier. Can the alignment be changed to skirt the community rather than sever it?

If not, examine what can be done to minimize the barrier effect. Can an intersection and crosswalk be developed to lessen barriers to interaction?

If not, examine what can be done to mitigate the impact. Can a pedestrian overpass be constructed? If access to a community center is impeded, can a new facility be constructed that is accessible?

For each of these steps, if an action is identified to address the barrier, examine what impact the action may have on the whole community. How would an overpass affect the safety and security of those using it? Select the mitigation measure that most adequately deals with concerns about crime; perhaps add lighting or design it with wide sight lines.

Examine opportunities for enhancement.

8. Using Public Involvement



Role of the Public

Public involvement is not intended to be a separate task in the community impact assessment process but rather fully integrated within planning and project development. Analysts should identify and work with the person responsible for public involvement for each project so that community input is timely, coordinated, and customized to minimize the burden on the public.

As is clear from the preceding sections, public involvement is integral to the impact assessment process. The public can provide information for, and assist in validating, each of the following activities:

- Development of the project's purpose-and-need statement and identification of alternatives.
- Development of the community profile.
- Identification and investigation of transportation impacts to the community.
- Identification of avoidance, minimization, mitigation, and enhancement opportunities.

Public involvement results in better assessments and project decisions that reflect community values. In addition, it enhances the credibility of the assessment process and its outcomes.

Principles

The planning and project development process must provide for an open exchange of information and ideas among the public, community impact analysts, and the entire project-development team. It should provide opportunities for early and continuing communication between the community and key project staff.

What part does the public play in a community impact assessment?

What are guidelines for effective public involvement?

What practices best encourage public participation?

Notification

Notification of activities is important because it lets the public know about proposed actions and that their input is valued. Project staff can facilitate public participation by adhering to the following guidelines:

- Provide clear information and timely public notice.
- Schedule public meetings or activities that are convenient to the public; such as immediately before or after the workday at a site within the business district, or in the evening at a community center or school within a neighborhood.

Ways to Notify the Public of Meetings

Make an announcement at the start of town meetings, religious services, and community center events.

Place posters at local businesses and gathering places, such as hair salons and grocery stores.

Distribute fliers at schools and on windshields of cars at shopping centers and public parking facilities.

Use community media, such as local newspapers, radio, local public-access television, and public-service announcements to reach residents.

- Reach out to the public rather than have them come to you.
- Use nontraditional and informal public involvement notification methods, taking special note to reach traditionally underserved populations.
- Avoid technical jargon and rephrase issues to encourage participation.
- Contact key stakeholders and community leaders (formal and informal) who can help notify the public.

What are keys to effective dialogue?

Communication

In order to facilitate effective communication, the community impact analyst and other members of the project-development team should remember the following keys to promoting open dialogue (shown on the next page).

Ways to Promote Open Dialogue

Provide a nonthreatening, open atmosphere.

Be responsive and honest.

Be prepared. Know the project, its status, and key contacts. Practice your presentation.

Use stand-alone, nontechnical handouts with maps and other visuals that communicate information clearly.

Make special efforts to be sensitive to the cultures and etiquette of the affected populations. A local liaison can be helpful to facilitate communication and provide guidance on etiquette. Staff training in interpersonal skills may be beneficial. In non-English-speaking communities, consider multilingual presentations and handouts, as appropriate.

Be polite and treat people fairly.

Techniques

Over 100 public involvement techniques are available.

Practitioners should employ a variety of methods throughout project development rather than rely on only one, such as the public hearing. In addition, practitioners should consider that informal techniques generally work best (e.g., small informal meetings rather than large formal ones, and selection of comfortable meeting places familiar to the community). If necessary, nontraditional approaches should be used to ensure the involvement of all parties, including the traditionally underserved (e.g., persons with disabilities, and low-income and Native American populations). Refer to FHWA/FTA's publication, *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-making*, for more information.

What are methods that work?

Sample of Commonly-Used Practices

Public meetings Newsletters

Workshops Focus groups

Advisory committees, ad hoc task forces, citizen work groups

Community events (e.g., fairs, block parties, and festivals)

Opening a field office near the project site or a mobile trailer along an affected route

Questionnaires and surveys

Personal contact, displays, and presentations at community activity centers, such as shopping centers



9. Documenting Findings

How are the findings used?

Application of Findings

The findings of a community impact assessment are valuable for decisionmaking throughout the project planning and development process. Thus, the "findings" are not merely something produced at the end of the assessment. Findings start off general in nature, with the community profile providing hints to impacts, then may shift and get more specific as more detailed information is gathered and impact studies force changes in the proposed project. Because of the dynamic nature of communities and changing status of the project, the results of a community impact assessment are continually subject to change.

Once the number of project alternatives is narrowed, the community impact assessment details are formally documented and the findings are presented at public hearings.

How are findings formally documented?

Documentation of Findings

The written findings are prepared for inclusion, or summarized and referenced, in the NEPA document—the Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This community impact material involves a factual presentation of information and potential impacts for each alternative and provides conclusions about methods to address adverse impacts as well as any proposed enhancements.

In addition, a community impact technical report may be produced as a stand-alone document if the complexity of the project, State procedures, severity of the impacts, or quality of data justify a specialized technical report. Information from such a technical report can be summarized and the report referenced in the NEPA document. If scoping

indicates that a community impact technical report is not needed, the analyst may move directly into preparing brief text sections on pertinent community topics, to be inserted directly into the NEPA document.

Because the community impact technical report and NEPA documents are made available to the public, they should be clear and understandable. This information must be an integral part of the public involvement and public hearing process.

Generating a Written Document

Documentation begins early and takes place throughout the assessment process. Written findings should be recorded throughout project planning and development while the analyst develops and reevaluates the community profile, assesses and reassesses impacts, and identifies solutions for adverse impacts for each alternative. Preparing an outline of the technical report or NEPA document sections will help facilitate the writing process and identify data needs during the assessment process.

The Technical Report

Since environmental documents are usually prepared to comply with NEPA, it is prudent to use a compatible format for the community impact technical report, as reflected in FHWA guidelines (TA 6640.8A). In addition, there may be State or local requirements.

Within an EIS, community impact assessment information would primarily appear in the following sections, but may appear elsewhere as well:

- Affected Environment (Community Profile).
- Environmental Consequences and Mitigation.

**When does
writing begin?**

**How should
the community
impact
technical
report be
presented?**

In addition, other presentation guidelines include:

- Begin the report with an executive summary.
- Discuss only topics relevant to the project. However, topics identified in 23 USC 109(h) should be addressed, lest it be assumed they were not examined.
- Include a summary of public involvement activities (number of meetings held, continuing efforts, substantive comments).
- Present findings in a clear, nontechnical manner, using graphics to aid understanding.
- Use an objective tone in the report. Be aware that it is a public document. Describe the community in a professional manner, avoiding the use of descriptions and terms that suggest a bias or might offend readers.
- Reach conclusions on each topic discussed. Document concerns, alternative strategies, and commitments.

23 USC 109(h) lists the types of adverse social and economic impacts that must be investigated and documented

Noise

Destruction or disruption of man-made resources, aesthetic values, community cohesion, and availability of public facilities and services

Employment effects

Tax and property value losses

Displacement of people, businesses, and farms

Disruption of desirable community and regional growth

10. Resources



INFORMATION

People

For additional information about the assessment of community impacts of proposed transportation projects, State transportation analysts are encouraged to seek out other internal and external specialists within their governmental unit. In addition, the Federal Highway Administration can provide guidance, through the following contacts:

- FHWA Division Environmental Coordinator.
- FHWA Regional Office Environmental Coordinator.
- FHWA Headquarters, Office of Environment and Planning, Environmental Operations Division.

A list of State Departments Of Transportation (DOT) community impact specialists is available from FHWA, Office of Environment and Planning, if peer input is desired.

Publications

A number of publications are available as references for community impact assessment, in addition to the requirements listed on page 6. These publications include, but are not limited to, the following:

AASHTO. *Guidelines on Citizen Participation in Transportation Planning*. 1978.

Interorganizational Committee on Guidelines and Principles. "Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment." *Impact Assessment*. Vol. 12, No. 2, Summer 1994, pp. 107-151.

Methodology of Social Impact Assessment. Community Development Series, Vol. 32. Edited by Kurt Finsterbusch and C.P. Wolf. Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross, Inc., 1977.

Who can
provide more
information?

What are
some
published
sources that
provide more
information?

N.C.I. Research, *Understanding Your Economy: Using Analysis to Guide Local Strategic Planning*. Prepared for the U.S. Economic Development Administration, September 1991, 162 pages.

Salant, Priscilla. *A Community Researcher's Guide to Rural Data*. Island Press, 1990, 93 pages.

U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA. *Environmental Policy Statement*, 1990 and 1994.

U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA. "Non-discrimination, Environmental Justice, and Community Impact Assessment in Planning and Project Development," memorandum to FHWA Field Offices, July 1995.

U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA and FTA. *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decisionmaking*. Summer 1996.

U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA. *Social Impact Assessment: A Sourcebook for Highway Planners, Vol. III: Inventory of Highway Related Social Impacts*. Final Report, June 1982.

U.S. Department of Transportation, FHWA and FTA. *Innovations in Public Involvement for Transportation Planning*. January 1994.

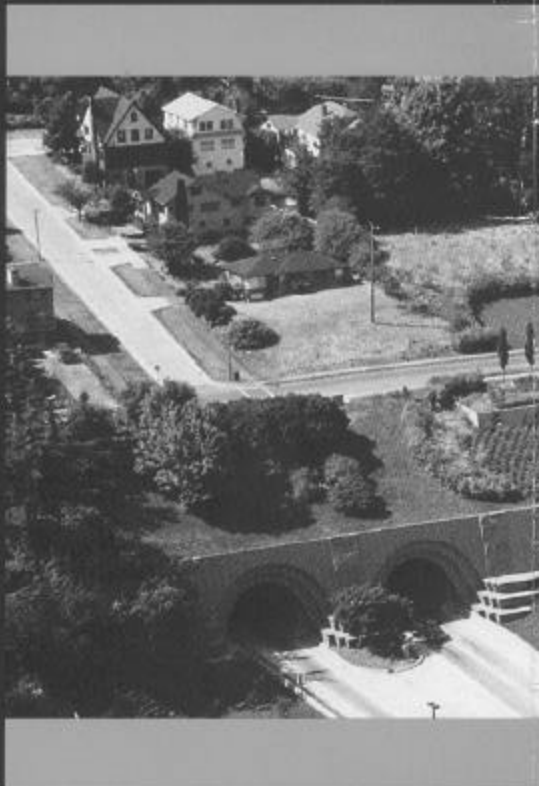


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